

## A Selection from Notes by Harold Briggs

There are just two kinds of real poetry -- the Bukowski variety and the Wallace Stevens. They are the ends of the spectrum. Between them are the gradations -- the blend and blur of lights that fail to illuminate. True, they burn with the same fire -- but not the same intensity. They may be a light in the window, but never a beacon ....

This has been so since the first drum beat, the first hymn to an unknown god, the first agonized cry against fate. Solomon's song knows no season, and the epic of Gilgamesh is its brother -- on these all poetry builds. They are the foundations of all song and belong to the heritage of all men. They are the corner stones of lyric and dramatic literature ....

They stand parallel as battle lines, or to put it in a modern frame, they are like ping pong players. Each serves the other and is responsible for keeping the game & the ball in action. In fact, they learn the game from each other. Without them, there would be no game or the writing of poetry. The lone voice in the wilderness is just that, and its influence is a myth kept alive by the failures. Everyone hears thunder, but a deaf man. Any whisper of importance is repeated by many people ....

There are examples in every age, starting with Homer whose opposite was Aristophanes. Who remembers, except the professors, the many voices of the Greek Anthology? This does not mean that many first rate, but second rank, poets should not be read. On the contrary, as Eliot said, there can be no great poetry without second rank poetry. No genius ever lived in a vacuum. Let us not ridicule the voice of the people! It is from the background of the street that Dante broke through the pettiness of the Middle Ages. Shakespeare was a great borrower from the common tongue ....

By trying for the ends of the spectrum, the young poet may avoid much that is sales-talk, propaganda, tinsel tears and dry corn ....

## A Comment by Marvin Malone

This yellow-page section has been personally selected to reflect the dimensions of Harold Briggs. The poems appearing here were unpublished and found among his papers. Harold B. published one book: Though Man Flies Angel High (Hors Commerce Press, Torrance, Calif., 1959), and other poems can be found in the following magazines: Aphrodite, Between Worlds, Chrysalis, Compositional Culture, Black Sun, Crocodile Review, Delta, Fat Frog, Halcyon, Intro, Measure, Mutiny, New Masses, Orlando Anthology, Pan, Pedagogue, Pegasus, Plumed



Horn(El Corno Emplumado), Poetmeat, Poetry Review -- University of Tampa, Prolet Folio, The Realist, Rebel Poet, The Smith, Sparrow, Whetstone, White Dove Review, Wisconsin Poetry Journal and The Wormwood Review, among others.

To know where one is physically (starting from scratch), one must read the night sky or a compass. On locating the North Pole, the South Pole can be deduced. Speaking as an editor who reads over 2,000 submissions per issue, I can say that most poets today know their physical location(witness: the self-address envelope), but very few know their poetic location or care. Briggs' bookstore was a major influence for those poets and editors who cared enough about poetry to actually read poetry. During the past 3 decades, there have been perhaps six bookstores in the United States that could be regarded as lodestones for poets seeking location. Briggs' Books N' Things was one. Two others are in New York City. This says something about the quality of Briggs and the real quality of current U.S.A. literature.

There are early and late poems here -- the goal, as I said before, is to suggest Briggs' dimensions:

I Call on Witness, William Blake

"I see so little of Mr. Blake," said Mrs Blake.  
"He is always in Paradise now."

If I am guilty, so is he.  
More powerful than radar,  
His vision pierced infinity.  
If love of man is treason,  
let it be.

He saw "all heaven in a rage,"  
The Angel at the window pane,  
The lesson and the lover's gain.  
If love of love is treason,  
let it be.

I call on witness, William Blake.  
In him I see the fool in me,  
Hanging from the witness tree.  
If love of truth is treason,  
let it be.